DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 559 CE 073 992

AUTHOR	Ferguson, Josephine L.
TITLE	Admissions Policies: The Keys to Success. DETC Occasional Paper Number 11.
INSTITUTION	Distance Education and Training Council, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Nov 94
NOTE	21p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Distance Education and Training Council, 1601 18th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20009-2529; http://www.detc.org ($5).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Admission Criteria; *Admission (School); Adult Education; Conventional Instruction; *Distance Education; Home Study; *Policy Formation; Postsecondary Education; *School Policy; *Selective Admission; Student Rights

ABSTRACT

Distance Education and Training Council (DETC) members must realize that sound admissions policies are the first step toward high quality education. DETC members should be willing to examine the need for qualification-based admissions policies like those used by "traditional" schools. Admission is critical to outcomes assessment because admissions practices drive institutions' enrollment volume, attrition rate, collection rate, overall reputation, academic quality, and long-term financial success. Steps to a better admissions policy include the following: define school mission; define educational objectives; know which students are desirable enrollees; study the characteristics of people who succeed in given career fields; determine an acceptable/efficient attrition rate; and determine the level of academic difficulty to be incorporated into courses. Possible admissions criteria include the following: previous academic record; work experience; interest in subject/field; nonacademic characteristics; parents' educational level; English literacy; literacy in language in which the student will be taught; financial ability; and disclaimers/exemptions. After schools have articulated their admissions criteria, they must take the measures required to implement their new admissions policies in full consideration of students' right to know what will be expected of them after admission to the school. Schools must realize that they are who they admit. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

CE

ED 407 559

DETC OCCASIONAL PAPER

11

Adm ions Po es: The y to Su ss

T COPY AVAIL

CE 073 992

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S Welch

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

DETC OCCASIONAL PAPER NUMBER 11

by

Josephine L. Ferguson
Member, Accrediting Commission of the
Distance Education and Training Council

Printed by ICS Learning Systems

Published by the Distance Education and Training Council, Washington, D.C.

November 1994

DETC OCCASIONAL PAPERS (formerly *NHSC Occasional Papers*) are essays intended to stimulate and encourage candid exchanges of ideas between distance study professionals. For a complete set of *Occasional Papers*, write or call the DETC.

Introduction

Distance Education and Training Council members have for many years analyzed the various ways to increase student enrollments, how to collect a greater percentage of tuition payments, how to optimize student services, and how to increase lesson completion rates. Educators continue to explore how much it costs to service an enrollment, and they monitor the costs per lesson to grade, cost of telephone inquiries, etc. Understandably, the business side of running a successful school merits continual command attention.

As institutions dedicated to offering quality education, shouldn't we be as good at "educating" as we are at running the business side of our enterprises? Being better at the academic side of our schools will not only increase the stature and academic acceptance of distance education as a respected method, but will also thoroughly enhance our reputation as well as improve our bottom lines.

The adage distance study educators have long subscribed to is: "A studying student is a paying student." In this *DETC Occasional Paper*, we will present the case that a well crafted student qualification-based admissions policy will produce *more* studying students and *better* financial results.

Standards Must Ensure Quality Education

The U.S. Secretary of Education's recently published "Procedures and Criteria for Recognition of Accrediting Agencies" mandates the Accrediting Commission of the DETC to have standards that effectively address the (educational) quality of an institution in such areas as: curricula, faculty, facilities, equipment, and supplies; fiscal and administrative capacity; student support services; recruiting and admissions practices, (i.e., academic calendars, catalogs, publications,

grading, and advertising); success with respect to student achievement in relation to mission; and record of student complaints. Long before this federal mandate, the Accrediting Commission of the DETC has worked diligently to assist accredited institutions in finding ways to improve educational quality. Since accreditation is a voluntary process, the DETC Commission is challenging schools to voluntarily analyze and change practices, as necessary, in an attempt to improve educational quality. The Accrediting Commission hopes that through voluntary action, accredited institutions will overcome any present weaknesses and make it unnecessary for the Commission to impose new standards, monitor schools more frequently, require more reports or take other adverse accrediting actions.

Sound Admissions is the First Step

Sound admissions is the first step toward quality education. This Occasional Paper will argue that by bringing admission requirements more in line with course objectives that more students will start and finish their studies.

Many private institutions could truly benefit from embracing the art of admitting only qualified students. When asked what admission criteria they now use, schools most often point to an "open" admissions policy, a high school diploma requirement, or make other indefinite statements. Before you, as a DETC accredited institution, can publish literature, hire sales representatives or meet DETC standards, before you publish your "objectives," before you can determine whether or not you need a combined resident program, before you decide the level at which you will offer courses, you need a sound policy on admitting students.

A considerable library of information has been written on admission procedures at colleges and universities. There are volumes to help

one understand the differences in high schools from which the students have graduated, to analyze a high school transcript, to track the success of students in particular courses and colleges, to analyze the records of those admitted with particular records from specific schools. Other texts explain about the number of high school English courses, foreign language courses or math courses necessary if a student is to succeed at a particular college. But all of this is the traditional concept of admission to a traditional resident college or school, and these aspects of admission may not be relevant to DETC members.

We all know that admission to a private vocational or avocational program, particularly to a distance education institution, is much different. We are admitting students to courses with vocational objectives as well as courses with academic objectives. We are offering courses intended for self-improvement, avocational and other objectives.

Historically, distance education/correspondence schools have regulated their admissions volume by changing down payment amounts, experimenting with discounts and bonuses, revising ad copy, offering new payment terms, etc. But these essentially marketing tactics do not address the real issue: student qualifications.

DETC members should be willing to examine the need for "qualifications-based" admissions policies like those used by "traditional" schools. In fact, DETC members probably need creative student-centered admission standards even more, since schools often never see the applicants seeking to enroll and most students never visit the school or meet the faculty.

The Admissions Industry

Organizations such as the College Board, the New York Regents and the American College Testing Program, all of which have developed tests to measure a student's ability to succeed in college, have become a critical influence in the direction higher education has taken. They have recognized that the nation needs a means of comparing postsecondary ability of students from vastly diverse and academically unequal high schools, and students with vastly different abilities. Thus, they have underscored the importance of the admission process.

The DETC standards emphasize the importance of sound admissions policy. Time tested accreditation standards of the DETC state, "The school must establish the qualifications which an applicant must posses to enable the successful assimilation of the educational materials furnished. The school must also determine with reasonable certainty, prior to the acceptance of the applicant, that the applicant has been informed of and has the proper qualifications to enroll in the course. The school must also determine that an applicant has no handicap, physical or otherwise, which could reasonably prevent the applicant's use of the knowledge or skills gained from the course."

Admission is Critical to "Outcomes Assessment"

Robert J. Godfrey, in his classic handbook entitled *Outcomes Assessment for Home Study Schools*, not only underscores the importance of admission, but also explains how to measure the effectiveness of a variety of admissions criteria. He suggests an equation: a student's success is based not only on what he learns in the program but also on what he brings into the program, thus stressing the importance of admissions criteria.

characteristics at entry	+	knowledge gained	=	total person at completion

Still, there has been some historical resistance among the ranks of DETC to the idea of using a selective admissions policy:

• There are some who still believe in "open admissions." They say, "this is a free country and it is the American way to treat everyone the same . . . we should not discriminate."

• There are also those who believe that everyone has a "right to fail." I hope that none of us really believes this. There is always the borderline case, the student who should be given a chance, even though all of the signs seem to indicate otherwise. But he is being given a *right to succeed*, not a right to fail. Enrolling students who we intuitively know will drop out is cynical: we risk destroying egos and trampling on someone's dream for a better life.

• There are those who fail to acknowledge the truism that to refuse admission to a student to your school may mean giving him an opportunity to succeed at another school. To reject a student for admission may mean doing the student a favor! While he may be headed for failure at your school, another school may afford him the chance to succeed. An ethical school salesperson or admissions officer should always be ready to advise a student on educational alternatives, including other DETC member schools.

• There are some who believe that all persons, regardless of their intellectual ability or their academic preparation, ought to be mature enough to make their own enrollment decisions. This philosophy is fine, but high drop out statistics argue against it.

• The use of commissioned sales representatives can, in itself, be

contradictory to sound admissions policy. With a commissioned sales approach, you may have opposite forces working against each other. On one hand, you may have a student who should be advised not to enroll and on the other, you have a sales representative who is depending on a particular enrollment in order to make a living.

Over the past century, more than 80 million Americans have enrolled in distance education/correspondence courses. Despite the ill-founded criticism that correspondence study is not very demanding or rigorous—all evidence points to the fact the distance study method makes *more* demands for discipline and sacrifice on the students' part—a feeling persists that correspondence study is a less valuable, less worthwhile way to study. Could it be that distance study's long tradition of "open admissions policies" has contributed to the so called image problem of the field? "They'll enroll anybody!" is a phrase that may have been working against DETC's efforts to enhance its public acceptance.

What would happen if DETC schools were to change this tradition and start enforcing tighter student-centered admissions standards? If schools started insisting on tougher course entry requirements, would the resulting lowering of the number of new students be offset by the probable increase in total tuition collected?

Let's look at a theoretical example of how an open admissions policy stacks up against a program with tougher admissions prerequisites for a $1,000 course:

	New Enrollments	Non-Starts	Starts	Collected Tuition	Total Collections
Tougher Standards	75	5	70 x	$650	$45,500
Open Admissions	100	25	75 x	$500	$37,500

Providing that our assumptions (i.e., tough admissions will lead to fewer non starts and higher collection rates) are not too far off, this example shows how it might well pay to have a tougher admissions policy. At the very least, it is a theory worth testing.

By now you understand why a sound admissions policy is so important to your school. It ultimately controls your school for good or bad. The admission practices drive the institution's—

- enrollment volume
- attrition rate
- collection rate
- overall reputation
- academic quality
- long term financial success

Your admissions policy even controls your accreditation, because your compliance with many DETC standards is heavily based on your admissions policy.

What is Admission?

Admission is the process of screening students before accepting them for enrollment in order:

1. To encourage only students who have a reasonable chance to get something out of it, to avoid taking their money if you are reasonably sure that they will fail.

2. To make the best use of the energy and cost which the school expends to make the course or program available.

3. To fulfill the institution mission, to control the definition of what the school really is.

4. To get the mix of students you want.

5. To uphold the standards and ethical statements of DETC.

Six Steps to a Better Admissions Policy

Here are six steps to follow in establishing an admissions policy tailored to the uniqueness of your school.

1. Define Mission of the School, not just educational or teaching objectives—Why do you exist? To help the blind, to convert students to Christianity, to help the disadvantaged, to supply workers for a particular vocation, to teach a skill, to rehabilitate the incarcerated, to teach a particular philosophy of life? What is your reason for being? Your mission may include multi-purposes.

2. Define Educational Objectives: For both individual courses and for the school—this is the most important step in the admissions process. Admission is closely related to your educational objectives. Before you can have admissions standards, you must know what you hope to achieve educationally. What outcomes will the student achieve from studying the course?

    a. A body of knowledge in a particular field?

    b. To perform a specific skill or skills?

    c. How much skill? Enough to be employed in a specific job as defined by the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* (DOT).

    d. Will the student be ready to enter a job for which he or she must have a high school diploma to qualify?

e. Are you planning to offer a degree program? What additional admission requirements are necessary?

f. Will you need a supplementary resident program in order to ensure that the student can meet course objectives?

You should be sure that your objectives are compatible with the educational services you offer, with the requirements of the career field, with the advertising and promotional material you plan to use as well as with the decision as to whether or not you have a resident program.

Before settling on your educational objectives you will also want to ask yourself the following questions:

g. Will I be able to provide sufficient counselling services to permit the students whom I admit to achieve stated objectives?

h. Am I willing to have a faculty large enough and qualified to deliver technical information and academic advisement not provided in the texts and study guides?

i. Are instructional materials sufficiently comprehensive, do they have sufficient depth and are they organized and presented in a way that the students can achieve my planned objectives?

3. Know *who* you want to enroll. What are the characteristics of students you want as your graduates? Do you want tradesmen for a particular field? Do you want a professional or para-professional student who, when mastering the course you are offering, can go into a specific career field or business, e.g., legal stenographer, home inspector, etc.

4. Study the characteristics of people who succeed in the career field. Will your enrollees have these characteristics? Which of these characteristics are innate; which can be taught via distance study? Don't assume that you know answers to some of these questions. Study your present student body. Learn which traits most frequently produce graduates who complete and get jobs. Follow suggestions in Robert Godfrey's *Outcomes Assessment Handbook*. Remember that "Outcomes Assessment is the program by which you measure the changes that occur in the students" who have been admitted.

Your research should yield answers to the following:

a. Does a high school diploma make a difference? Did students with a high school diploma do better in your course than those without the diploma? Did they stay in the program longer? Did they get jobs more readily?

b. What about the quality of the high school record? Did higher grades and more difficult courses in high school predict better success in your program?

c. What is your job placement rate?

d. What is your attrition rate? What is your completion rate?

e. What physical limitations have impeded progress of your students?

f. What about ability to benefit? Did the absence of qualifications normally required of your students impede them from getting a job? Such factors as high school diploma, experience, police record, age, citizenship, etc., may have pre-

cluded the employment of students even if the course was successfully completed.

Try building your data base on each student in such a way as to facilitate future research. This will make the task of future DETC-required self-evaluation less burdensome and will also help you get a more timely snapshot of your current student body.

5. Determine what attrition rate you believe to be acceptable and efficient. What is compatible with your mission? Is it within your mission to strive for 100% completion? Or should you settle for a lesser completion rate?

6. Determine the level of academic difficulty you wish incorporated into your course(s). What about reading level? Keep in mind that study instructions and academic counseling support must be compatible with the students' academic ability.

Developing Admissions Criteria

Now that you have made a thoughtful evaluation of what your school is and what it wants to be, now that you have researched the traits of successful graduates, you are ready to develop your admissions criteria. In doing so, please remember that what we are really developing is a group of Predictors of Success, however you have chosen to define it. Success may mean students getting a job, learning a skill, completing the course or gaining self gratification. Each school is unique, and although admissions criteria will be similar between schools, they will almost certainly not be the identical.

In listing your criteria for admission you will wish to consider including:

1. Previous academic record:

   - High school diploma (documented proof of high school completion)
   - High school transcript
   - GED or General Education Diploma
   - Test to prove Ability to Benefit (ATB). Such a test may be desirable with or without a high school diploma.
   - Statement of circumstances which controlled the above records (age, jobs held, etc.).
   - College Record and transcript

2. Work experience.

3. Interest in the subject and/or the field (preference tests and aptitude tests are widely available).

4. Non-academic characteristics, i.e., sex, age, religion, race (do not discriminate), physical characteristics (handicaps), geographic residence, etc.

5. Parents' educational level.

6. Literacy in English.

7. Literacy in the language in which the student will be taught.

8. Financial ability.

9. Disclaimers—Exceptions, i.e., age younger with parental consent, certain courses may require physical dexterity, special understanding of math, etc.

Remember that the admissions criteria must be compatible with the course's objectives and the candidate's ability to benefit and the tuition refund policy. Review DETC standards to ensure compliance.

Implementing Your Policy

Having established and articulated your admissions criteria, you are now ready to implement your policy. Here are some guidelines to follow:

1. Involve the Education Director throughout the entire process. Make sure that the Education Director is a key figure in developing and implementing the policy. It is this key person who knows the course(s), who has guided their development, who having hired the faculty knows what the faculty will expect of the student. The Education Director will also know what characteristics the student must have to succeed in the program.

2. Be certain that the persons who are responsible for the admissions decisions understand the real meaning of test scores and the level of difficulty of the course. Some administrators believe that all salespersons and those making contact with the student should have taken and mastered the course(s). Involve a second official in the admissions decision, not just the salesperson or telemarketing person. This is vital in cases involving borderline applicants.

3. Be prepared to reinforce the decision to admit weak or marginally qualified applicants with all of the support services he or she needs. Don't treat admitted students as if they were all alike. They never are! Be prepared to provide students, as needed, with:

- incentives for progress through the course
- encouragement counselling: identify the ways in which the student is weak and offer special support, not just "try a little harder and don't give up," give substantive/tutorial support, ask for comments and criticism, be responsive to suggestions.
- recognize potential failure early and do something about it (refer to DETC Standard III, Educational Services).
- include a statement on academic dismissal, providing the student with a reasonable and face-saving escape route which will protect his ego and his financial investment (a full refund!)

4. Publish your admission policy in as many places as possible. Consider including it in advertisements as well as all catalogs and brochures. Publish placement and attrition rates to allow prospects to judge their potential for success.

What Prospective Students Have a Right to Know

The implementation of your policy is not complete unless you have also disclosed all that the prospective students have a right to know before they commit themselves to you. They should know:

1. Will I have a reasonable chance to finish the course? Do I have the ability to succeed in the course?

2. Will I be qualified to get a job with what I learn from the course?

3. Will I acquire a specific body of knowledge in a particular field?

4. Will I learn a skill? Exactly what is that skill? Where may it be put to use?

5. What other abilities, and characteristics must I possess in order to achieve my goal?

6. Will I enjoy the course? What will be most difficult for me given my past experience and education?

7. What physical limitations might impede my completion of the course or my subsequent success in the career field?

8. Is there another school available which will better satisfy my needs and where I might be able to get this training more quickly or more inexpensively? Why is your school the best for me?

9. What test, if any, do you require for admission? What is the cut-off score, if any? What percent of candidates like myself pass the test?

10. What is your refund policy? How do I request a refund if I choose to drop out of the course?

11. What type of a payment schedule will I be required to meet? Monthly payments? When do payments begin?

You are Who You Admit

Establishment and implementation of a qualifications-based admissions policy should be an ongoing process. Your continuing study and

modifications to the policy will sharpen and refine it. Your experiences may cause you to modify your objectives, your reading level, size of faculty, size of student body or manipulation of any of the factors in the mix.

A sound policy and its rigorous use will result in the increased reputation of your school, the maximization of your enrollment, and should make your school more profitable.

The development of an admissions policy is an art, not a science. It is individual to each school. It must be created from your objectives, from your instincts, your study and understanding of what your school is, what you want your school to become.

About the Author

Mrs. Josephine L. Ferguson has spent more than 35 years in the management of postsecondary education at the university, state and federal levels, retiring in 1987 from the position of Regional Administrator in Student Financial Aid for the U.S. Department of Education for Region V. Mrs. Ferguson holds a Masters in Mangement degree from J. L. Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University. She speaks and serves as a consultant on higher education administration.

Mrs. Ferguson has served as a public member of the DETC Accrediting Commission since 1987 and has participated in more than 60 on-site examinations.

Other Occasional Papers Available

Number 1—*Student Services: Achilles Hell or Crown Jewel?* by Michael P. Lambert, Executive Director, NHSC

Number 2—*What Manger Doesn't Study at Home?* by Dr. Gordon Wills, Principal, The International Management Centres

Number 3—*Toward Better Service and Testing* by Dennis Foltz, Vice President of Education and Operations, Gemological Institute of America

Number 4—*Testing Home Study Advertising* by Jack Thompson, Consultant

Number 5—*Conducting Graduate Surveys* by Mary McKeown, Vice President, American School

Number 6—*Enrollment Contracts for Home Study Schools* by William Wright, American School

Number 7—*Evaluating Your School's Worth* by Michael P. Lambert

Number 8—*Getting the Most PR for Your School* by Sally R. Welch, Assistant Director, NHSC

Number 9—*The Effectiveness of the Home Study Method* edited by Sally R. Welch, Assistant Director, NHSC

Number 10—*Home Study Academic Transcripts* by Sally R. Welch, Assistant Director, NHSC

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND TRAINING COUNCIL

1601 18TH STREET, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20009-2529
(202) 234-5100